Catch Us if You Can:
Election Monitoring and International Norm Creation

Until 1962, there were no recorded cases of international election observation in

sovereign states.[1] Today, election monitoring is widely referred to as an international norm, and

it is rare for a developing country to hold an election without inviting international observers.[2]

Upwards of 80 percent of elections held outside of consolidated democracies are now

internationally monitored, but puzzlingly, many leaders invite foreign observers and orchestrate

electoral fraud in front of them. As illustrated in Figure 1, the global rate of observed elections

increased substantially between 1960 and 2006, even while increasing numbers of elections were

criticized by international observers.[3] Negative reports from monitors have been linked to

domestic uprising and electoral revolutions, reductions in foreign aid, exclusion from

international forums, and other forms of internationally imposed sanctions. Given the potential

costs associated with inviting observers and being internationally condemned for election fraud,

the fact that so many leaders of sovereign states continue to invite international observers

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[1] Historically, some plebiscites in disputed territories were internationally supervised (Beigbeder 1994; Wambaugh 1920, 1933).

[2] Consistent with much of the literature, I define a norm as a "shared standard of behavior appropriate for actors with a given identity" (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998; Florini 1996; Katzenstein 1996; Klotz 1995). For discussions of the norm of international election observation, see Bjornlund 2004; Carothers 1997; Kelley 2008a; Rich 2001; Santa-Cruz 2005b.

[3] An observer report is coded as negative if, in a post-election statement or final report, foreign observers seriously questioned the winner of the election or the legitimacy of the process.

presents an empirical puzzle. Why has the decision to invite foreign election observers—and the corresponding international involvement in clearly domestic political processes—become an international norm? More generally, how do international norms develop in the absence of advocacy or imposition by powerful states?

[FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE]

I argue that that states seeking international benefits can generate unintended yet consequential international norms. As prominent scholars argue, international norms help govern international interactions in the absence of global government (Krasner 1983; Kratochwil and Ruggie 1986; Katzenstein 1996; Fearon and Wendt 2002; Katzenstein, Keohane, and Krasner 1998). In explaining the causes of international norms, the international relations literature to date has focused primarily on two mechanisms: advocacy by norm entrepreneurs, who are motivated by principled ideas and whose efforts bring about desired changes in state behavior; and imposition by powerful states, typically in order to facilitate cooperation within international institutions.[4] At least one other class of norms is important in global governance, and does not fit neatly into either of the previous categories. "Signaling norms" are distinct in the mechanism that creates them and frequently in their consequences, as I argue below. These norms are generated through a bottom-up process, initiated when state leaders react to diffuse changes in

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[4] For representative works involving norms and international cooperation, see Schelling 1960; Keohane 1984, 1986; Krasner 1983 and a more general discussion by Katzenstein, Keohane, and Krasner 1998. For widely recognized work on norm entrepreneurs, see Keck and Sikkink 1998; Klotz 1995; Finnemore and Sikkink 1998; Finnemore 1996; Nadelmann 1990; Risse-Kappen, Ropp, and Sikkink 1999; Price 1998; Thomas 2001.

the international environment, and become widely shared—and enforced—"standards of appropriate behavior for actors with a given identity" (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998).

Existing Explanations of Norm Development

This article presents a theory of international norm formation rooted in the dynamics of international signaling. Although the model was developed to explain why leaders invite election monitors even when engaging in widespread election fraud, the argument has the potential to explain the diffusion of a number of other puzzling behaviors among states, and offers an alternative explanation for a subset of international norms. In the most widely cited theory to date, social constructivists describe norm development in ideational language: norm entrepreneurs, motivated by principled ideas, seek to change international or domestic behavior through the generation of new international norms (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998). Although instrumental logics play a part in many related arguments— the work of these activists may be intended to, for example, generate costs for actors who fail to comply with the new norm—norm entrepreneurs are central in initiating and spreading the new behavior. Entrepreneurs and activists, however, were conspicuously absent when election observation was initiated and spread. Some scholars infer the existence of norm entrepreneurs because election observation has become a norm (Kelley 2008a), but evidence of norm entrepreneurship in election observation is nearly all after the end of the Cold War, and well after election observation was initiated and diffused widely, undermining confidence in its explanatory potential. Even prominent election observers—and potential norm entrepreneurs—like Jimmy Carter and the Carter Center were explicit in their reluctance to pressure governments to invite international observers. As Eric Bjornlund writes, "(e)lection monitoring became the most prominent activity of the [Carter Center] almost by accident, as an extension of its efforts to promote peace" (2004, 75). During

the initiation and early diffusion of election observation, to the extent that international

organizations, states, and NGOs commented on election observation, they advocated

noninterference in the domestic politics of sovereign states, and were explicitly reluctant to

support election observation (Beigbeder 1994; Bjornlund 2004; Slater 1967). The first known

invitations from leaders of sovereign states to potential international observers were refused on

the grounds that international election monitoring violated sovereignty. For example, the United

Nations received its first invitation to provide election observers in 1958, yet despite dozens of

invitations, refused to send election observers to any sovereign states until 1990 (Beigbeder

1994; Ludwig 1995). In short, norm entrepreneurs do not appear to have been critical in

initiating election observation.

Within international relations, institutionalists offer the other leading theory of norm

development. For institutionalists, norms are embedded within international institutions and are

therefore generated along with them, frequently as a result of demand for interstate cooperation

or through imposition by powerful states. In a similar vein, but initiated in the economics and

international law literatures, norms and other social conventions can develop "spontaneously" as

a result of repeated interactions, and persist because they are Nash equilibria (Sugden 1989).[5] In

this literature, norms are created because they help facilitate cooperation by, for example,

providing focal points, common knowledge, or by constraining or ordering preferences

(Schelling 1960; Katzenstein, Keohane, and Krasner 1998). Although the focus on strategic

interaction in my argument is based in part on the approaches common to this literature, there are

a number of important differences between the types of norms discussed by institutionalists and

the creation of the norm of election observation. Election monitoring began diffusely and was

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[5] See also Axelrod 1986; Koh 1997.

initiated by individual leaders, outside of any formal or informal regime. As above, invitations from leaders seeking election observers were initially rejected by prominent international organizations like the United Nations and the Organization of American States. To be explained by existing institutionalist theories, the norm of election observation would have to help facilitate cooperation or serve as a focal point within an international regime, yet it is unclear how election monitoring would serve such a purpose. In terms of causal mechanisms, institutionalists frequently focus on norms that are demanded or imposed by powerful states for some other reason. Yet if the norm of election observation was imposed by powerful states, they left little record of their actions to pressure governments to adopt election observation. Similarly, as Arturo Santa-Cruz has argued, if powerful states were interested in promoting election observation, it is not clear why they did not send their own bilateral election monitors or why they would create such a diffusely organized system with literally dozens of organizations willing to send election observers (Santa-Cruz 2005a).

Signaling and International Norm Development

In contrast to theories that focus on top-down activist pressure or imposition by powerful states, I argue that the norm of international election observation was created through a diffusely motivated, bottom-up process. Election observation was initiated as a signal of a government's commitment to democratization, in response to increased rewards associated with joining the informal club of democracies. Particularly for leaders of regimes that were not already established as democracies, increased democracy-contingent benefits created an incentive for incumbent leaders to identify a credible signal that they were, in fact, democratizing. To make this argument, I present a simple model developed to explain the diffusion of election monitoring

and its creation as an international norm. The formal signaling game is referenced but not presented, as the implications are intuitive.

In my model, there are two types of actors: "incumbents" and "democracy promoters." The assumed incumbent can be one individual or a group of leaders, depending on the regime type. After elections are announced, incumbents choose whether to invite international monitors and to what degree they will abide by the rules of a democratic election. They also choose the effort that they will devote to concealing election manipulation. Among governments with regime types that are not well established, I assume that there are two general types: "true-democrats" and "pseudo-democrats." True-democrats are those incumbents who obey the letter and the spirit of electoral laws: they follow rules regulating electoral competition (they do not commit electoral fraud) and comply with expected behavior following an election (if they lose, they peacefully transfer power). Put simply, they act like leaders in established democracies, working to maintain power within the confines of democratic institutions. Pseudo-democrats also hold elections, and may hold free and fair elections if they believe that they are popular enough to win outright. If they are not sure that they will win, they manipulate the election to their benefit. The crucial differences between true-democrats and pseudo-democrats are that first, pseudo-democrats are willing to cheat and, second, if they are defeated, they do not willingly transfer power to another party.

The other major actors in the development of election observation are "democracy promoters." Democracy promoters include state and non-state actors, and share a preference for working with or rewarding democratic governments. Democracy promoters include powerful western states, foreign investors, international organizations, and any other international actors with a preference for democracy and the ability to allocate international benefits. Although

democracy promoters are important in my argument in that they make international benefits available, they did not pressure for election observation per se. Rather, the diffuse growth of benefits associated with joining the informal club of democratic nations was sufficient to motivate change in the behavior of governments with less established regime types.

I assume that democracy promoters can be modeled as a coherent actor in order to examine how an incumbent's decision to invite election monitors is influenced by the expected international response. During the Cold War, geopolitics meant that democracy promoters were primarily confined to the US sphere of influence, the implications of which are evaluated below. Since the end of the Cold War, in the context of international democracy promotion, an expanding number of actors have shared similar preferences for democracy and frequently act in concert through intergovernmental organizations. Organizations such as the United Nations, the Organization of American States, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the Inter-Parliamentary Union, and the European Union have made official proclamations confirming their preference for democracy and transparency in other states in the world.[6] They have backed up this preference for democracy with significant investment in democracy promotion and increases in the amount of foreign aid that is linked to progress toward democratic and transparent institutions. Additionally, evidence from a variety of studies suggests that other international actors are more likely to reward democracies than non-democracies. The diverse body of research demonstrating advantages that are more likely to accrue to democracies

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[6] Among many documents that discuss these official proclamations, see the series of United Nations documents entitled "Enhancing the effectiveness of the principle of periodic and genuine elections, specifically A/RES/44/146; and the 1990 (1990). See also (Goodwin-Gill 2006; Diamond 2002; Carothers 1997, 1999).

than non-democracies includes foreign direct investors (Jensen 2003, 2008; Li and Resnick 2003), international actors who recognize the "democratic advantage" (Schultz and Weingast 2003), the increase in international legitimacy due to democracy (McFaul 2004; Rich 2001) the post-Cold War increase in foreign aid for democracies (Dunning 2004), and even the increase in tourism apparently enjoyed by democratic states (Neumayer 2004). Enforcement of such commitments is rarely coordinated, but I argue that even diffuse responses to state behavior by international actors can be sufficient to influence the decision calculus of leaders.[7]

In this model, democracy promoters support true-democrats and withhold benefits from pseudo-democrats. Before the norm is created, incumbents only play the game when their regime type is uncertain. The maximum value of democracy-contingent benefits changes over time. For both true and pseudo-democrats to invite observers, the anticipated "democracy premium" must be large enough to outweigh the costs and risks associated with inviting observers. Pseudo-democrats weigh the benefits of inviting versus the likelihood and costs of being caught. Pseudo-democrats who invite observers must pay costs to successfully hide or minimize election manipulation: if they do not, the signal fails, and they must pay the consequences of being perceived as a pseudo-democrat.

Following an election, democracy promoters update their beliefs about the government's type based on whether observers were invited, and contingent on an invitation, on the content of the post-election reports. If democracy promoters believe that only some true-democrats invite observers, an incumbent that chooses not to invite observers could logically be a true-democrat,

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[7] This point is similar to Tomz's argument about state reputation in international capital markets. "Investors do not need to explicitly coordinate or even know each other to have beliefs about reputation or 'type' of government." (Tomz 2007).

and may continue receiving democracy-contingent benefits. However, if all true-democrats invite observers, then following an election, a democracy promoter's only reasonable post-election belief is that any non-inviting incumbent is a pseudo-democrat.

This model can be used to explain the initiation, diffusion, and creation of the norm of election observation. Among states competing for international benefits, election observation began as a signal to democracy promoters from true-democrats. The first documented invitation to international observers came from José Figures, Costa Rica's "father of democracy," who in 1958 attempted to invite observers from the United Nations and the Organization of American States to demonstrate that the Costa Rican elections would be an "example to the Americas."[8] Election observation was initiated during the Cold War, and during the Cold War, democracy-contingent benefits were available primarily to a subset of states that were already Western allies. The end of the Cold War increased the availability of democracy-contingent benefits, both in magnitude and in the range of eligible countries that could compete for them. As election monitoring became recognized among democracy promoters as a signal of a regime's commitment to democratization, virtually all true-democrats had the incentive to invite observers, especially when their type was not already well established, as true-democrats assumed little risk by inviting observers. As a result of this benefit-seeking behavior, democracy-promoters developed consistent beliefs, perceiving that all true-democrats invited observers. In this model, this change in beliefs among democracy promoters is the norm of election observation. The norm also means that not inviting observers became an unambiguous signal that a regime was a pseudo-democracy, thus giving pseudo-democrats the incentive to mimic the signal, and to invite observers and risk a negative report.

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[8] "Costa Rica Inviting Election Observers," *New York Times*, January 16, 1958.

One might question why democracy promoters would rely on a signal if it were imitated by pseudo-democrats. If the only information revealed to democracy promoters was whether a government invited observers or not, the signal would be grow less informative as it was imitated by more pseudo-democrats. However, inviting observers remains useful to democracy promoters despite mimicry by pseudo-democrats because the process of election observation reveals additional information about the inviting country, particularly in the form of observers' post-election statements and final report. For pseudo-democrats, an invitation to international observers comes with the risk of a negative report, and the leader either has to devote effort to cheating in a manner that is unlikely to be caught and condemned by international observers or accept the consequences of elections condemned as fraudulent.

Additionally, democracy promoters and true-democrats share an incentive to improve the accuracy of the signal: in this case by making it more difficult for pseudo-democrats to receive a positive report from respected international observers.[9] This incentive creates upward pressure on the quality of the signal, with true-democrats inviting observers to engage in more extensive

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[9] Those familiar with signaling games will recognize that this model is based in part on economic theory. In the "market for lemons" famously described by economist George Akerlof, when consumers possess little information about the quality of a product, such as used cars, and the quality of the product is known to vary, the market fails. Consumers avoid cars that are "lemons," but cannot distinguish between high and low quality products. Sellers of high-quality used cars cannot command a sufficiently high price, and so choose not to sell their vehicles, thus lowering the expected quality of used cars on the market, and eventually causing only undesirable lemons to be for sale. Rather than risk a lemon, buyers in this market avoid used cars entirely.

observation, observe the entire electoral process, and deploy monitors throughout the country, months in advance of the election (Bjornlund 2004).

This theory can also be stated in more general terms, and potentially applied to the diffusion of other international behaviors. Information between international actors is asymmetric: states possess accurate information about their own type, and other international actors can have difficulty judging whether another state is an undesirable type. Across a variety of issue areas, international actors benefit from interacting with or promoting certain types of characteristics among other states in the international system, and therefore have the incentive to support states that are believed to possess valued characteristics. For states possessing such characteristics but lacking a matching reputation, this type of international "market" creates an incentive for leaders to identify credible signals of their valued characteristics.

Many states in the international system seek international benefits—such as increased investment, trade, foreign aid, military support, membership in international organizations, legitimacy, or prestige. I assume that such international benefits are targeted toward states possessing valued characteristics and withdrawn from states that are revealed not to possess them. Like other signaling games with asymmetric information, benefit-seeking leaders possess more information about their own characteristics than other international actors. Even when influential international actors prefer to interact with specified types of states, they can not always distinguish good types from bad types and, all else held equal, they prefer not to reward states of uncertain type. Thus, benefit-seeking states are motivated to find a solution to this market failure. A credible signal of their type to other international actors represents such a solution (Spence 1973).

Within international politics it is well known that states vary in their type. Yet in many issue areas, international benefits are allocated by a diffuse set of actors, including other states, international organizations, international NGOs, and multinational corporations. In most cases there is no supranational body that coordinates clear standards for how states can credibly demonstrate that they possess a given valued characteristic. Frequently, such signals are not mandated, imposed, nor even articulated by benefit-giving actors, who can simply continue rewarding states that are already known to possess valued characteristics. Rather, the impetus is on benefit-seeking states to identify credible signals of their type.

Signaling behaviors have been linked to social norms by Robert Axelrod, who argues that individuals follow existing social norms in part because "violating [the norm] would provide a signal about the type of person you are" (Axelrod 1986, 1106). Dressing sloppily at a formal dinner, he argues, not only draws disapproving stares from other diners, but may lead them to conclude more generally that you are a lazy, cheap, or rude person. Axelrod links this concept to the creation of new social norms, which grow out of "behavior that signals things about individuals that will lead others to reward them" and that "as more and more people use the signal to gain information about others, more and more people will adopt the behavior that leads to being treated well" (Axelrod 1986, 1107).

States seeking international benefits, in my theory, are similar to individuals seeking social approval in Axelrod's argument. A signal becomes a norm when the relevant audience assumes that all desirable types engage in a specified behavior. Note that this interaction between the "givers and takers" of international benefits is dynamic. If all states with a given desirable characteristic send the same signal (or international actors believe that they to do so), even states that do not actually possess the valued characteristic should attempt to fake the signal. Once a

norm exists, refusing to signal reveals with certainty that a state is an undesirable type. Thus, undesirable types should attempt to mimic the signal when possible, even if it is considerably more costly for them to do so. Adoption of the behavior as an international norm reinforces the incentives for states to continue the behavior, and also creates incentives for international actors to increase the costs for undesirable types to imitate the signal.

Overall, signals are useful to benefit-giving actors when they seek to support actors with characteristics that are difficult to observe directly, when process of signaling reveals additional information about the signaling actor, and when sending the signal is more costly to "bad" types.[10] In the case of international election monitoring, the signal not only requires inviting international observers, but also receiving their endorsement of the election. Governments that invite observers and receive negative reports fail to signal that they are holding plausibly democratic elections.

Explaining the Spread of Election Observation: Empirical Evaluation

Thus far I have focused on outlining a signaling theory of norm formation. I now turn to whether the empirical evidence is consistent with the argument. Like most cross-national research in international relations, establishing causality is difficult. However, if the theory is true, a number of observable implications must not be contradicted by the evidence. I present and evaluate these implications below. To do so, I compiled an original dataset of all national level elections from 1960-2006. Each observation in the dataset is a separate election. Due to missing data for several independent variables, microstates (less than 500,000 residents) are excluded, leaving 158 independent states that held one or more elections between 1960 and 2006.

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[10] This emphasis on the costs of norm-violating behavior is similar to Axelrod (1986).

The data on observed elections cover all election-holding countries outside of the developed democratic world. First, data were collected from organizations that sponsor election observation missions. Because some reports have been lost or are no longer public, for each election after 1978, newswire reports on dates surrounding elections were also searched for mention of international observers, so that the record of whether an election was monitored was checked by organization and by election, and data were collected from all election observation missions. For each election (each observation in the dataset), there is an indication of whether or not it was observed and, when possible, by whom. Many elections are observed by multiple groups, and both international NGOs and intergovernmental organizations (IGOs) are recorded as sponsors of observation missions.

According to my argument, election observation was initiated by state leaders in response to an increase in the availability of democracy-contingent international benefits. Democracy-contingent benefits should have only been available to Western allies during the Cold War. During the Cold War, democracy promotion was secondary to other valued characteristics, and the weight of anti-communism far exceeded the weight of democracy. Therefore, the first observable implication is that Cold War alliance patterns should dictate patterns of observation before 1989 (Kelley 2008a). After the Cold War, the value of anti-communism decreased relative to the value of democratic political institutions, and formerly communist or non-aligned states became eligible for democracy contingent benefits. Thus, alliance patterns should predict which countries were positioned to benefit the most from inviting observers at the end of the Cold War. Consistent with these expectations, of the nineteen countries that invited observers before 1989, sixteen were US allies. Three were non-aligned (and former British colonies), and one (Nicaragua) was allied with the USSR for at least part of the Cold War.

As the importance of anti-communism decreased, the relative influence of democracy promotion increased, and the range of countries that could compete for democracy-contingent benefits expanded rapidly. Consistent with my theory, the pattern of inviting states changed dramatically in the immediate post-Cold War period. To illustrate, between 1989 and 1995, international observers were invited by seventeen former Soviet allies, nineteen countries that were non-aligned, thirteen newly independent states, and nineteen former US allies.[11] In just a few years, the availability of democracy contingent benefits expanded rapidly, and election observation quickly spread to every region in the developing world.

My theory also suggests that true-democrats initiated election observation. The implication is therefore that early inviters should be more democratic than average until the norm is established. As cheating pseudo-democrats began to mimic the signal of true-democrats, the average level of democracy among inviting countries should decrease. As election monitoring became widely accepted and nearly all benefit-seeking governments had the incentive to invite observers, the pattern of inviting countries should converge toward the average level of democracy throughout the developing world. Figure 2 provides a visual representation of the types of countries likely to invite observers by plotting the average *POLITY* scores among countries that invited observers (using a locally weighted regression line) against the average *POLITY* score across all countries in the world. All scores for observed elections are lagged by one year to exclude changes caused by the observed elections. Note that the average *POLITY* scores in the first observed elections in the 1960s were close to the global mean. From 1970-1990, observed elections were in countries with more democratic political institutions than in the global average. From 1990 to the present, the means converge as elections and election

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[11] Cold War alliances patterns coded from Walt (1987).

observation spread widely. Note that during this period the reports of observers, rather than merely the invitation to observers, became a more important component of the signal.

[FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE]

The evidence thus far is consistent with my argument: early inviters are more likely to be allies of the US until the end of the Cold War, and were more democratic than average. I now turn to a more comprehensive evaluation of the correlates of observed elections in the post-1990 period, when election observation diffused rapidly throughout the developing world. Before 1990 observed elections were relatively rare events. As Figure 1 shows, monitoring quickly diffused in the post-1990 period. Pooling these two distinct time periods would be methodologically problematic, and rather than introduce a more complicated modeling strategy, I simply limit the regression analysis to the correlates of the rapid diffusion of election observation in the 1991-2006 period.

I first introduce variables used to measure parameters from the model, and then present the cross-national empirical results. Unless otherwise referenced, all data were collected by the author, and are described in detail in the online codebook.[12] Including all independent states holding national elections with a population greater than 500,000, the full dataset consists of 1756 individual first-round elections held between 1960 and 2006. In the models presented below for the 1991-2005 period, there are 714 observations of elections in 146 countries.

Two sets of variables are important in explaining an incumbent's decision to invite observers. As outlined in my theory, uncertainty about a given government's type (whether the incumbent is a true-democrat or pseudo-democrat) should be a strong predictor of whether a government has the incentive to signal its commitment to democracy by inviting international

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observers. Among countries that allow a minimum level of electoral competition, there are several observable characteristics that indicate that a regime type is particularly uncertain. The commitment to democracy of incumbents who hold elections following an interruption of democratic rule or after a period of autocratic rule is highly uncertain, and can lead to democratization or further entrenchment of autocracy. I therefore include measures of whether the election is the first multiparty election (*First Multiparty)*, whether previous elections had been suspended (*Suspended Elections*), and a measure of whether the election was run by transitional leadership tasked with holding elections (*Transitional Leadership*). I also create an aggregate variable called *Uncertain Type* that is equal to one if the elections are the first multi-party elections, if previous elections had been suspended, or if the elections were held by transitional leadership. As a check on the face validity of the measure, Figure 3 shows the overtime pattern in elections held by governments defined as "uncertain" types and the diffusion of election observation among them. As expected, many elections were held by governments of uncertain type throughout the 1960-2006 period, and such incumbents began to invite election monitors in the early 1960s. By the early 1990s, if elections were held by a government of uncertain types, it was nearly certain that they would be internationally observed.

[FIGURE 3 ABOUT HERE]

There are several other indicators of whether or not an incumbent is an uncertain type and would therefore stand to gain by signaling a commitment to democracy. For some governments, the structure of political institutions means that little ambiguity exists about whether they are democratic. Governments that never hold national elections, like China and Saudi Arabia, are clearly perceived as non-democracies. Thus, in order to be part of the relevant universe of cases, a government must be holding elections, and countries that do not are excluded from the data.

Further, if a government holds elections in which opposition electoral competition is banned, there is little chance that they will be able to mimic the signal of true-democrats, even if they invite election observers. I therefore include a measure of whether opposition parties are allowed to participate in elections, called *Opposition Competition.* This is a dichotomous indicator that is equal to one if all of the following three conditions hold: opposition parties are legal, opposition is allowed (even minimally), and there is a choice of candidates on the ballot. If any of these conditions do not hold, or if there is any uncertainty or ambiguity about whether these conditions hold, it is coded as zero. *Opposition Competition* should be positively associated with observers.

Similarly, if a country is already a consolidated democracy, or becomes widely viewed as a consolidated democracy, the incumbent should be less likely to invite observers. Note that this has begun to change in recent years as most OSCE members, including countries like Belgium, France, the UK and the US, have recently invited observers (OSCE/ODIHR 2005). Nevertheless, in the post 1990 period there is little evidence that external actors questioned the democratic credentials of the long-term developed democracies of Western Europe and North America, as well as Japan, Australia, New Zealand. Countries that were successful in joining the European Union after 1989 are also coded as consolidated democracies beginning in the year that they formally became members of the organization. I code Israel and India as consolidated democracies, though the results are not sensitive to the coding of these two states. Additionally, several countries initially invited international observers but became widely perceived as democracies and were told as much by international monitoring organizations, including Chile after 1992 and the Czech Republic after 2003. Thus, *Consolidated Democracy* is equal to one if the country is one of the long-term developed democracies, is a member of the European Union, or if it was explicitly announced by a well-respected international monitoring group that it no

longer needed to invite international observers because the country was now considered democratic.

The availability of international democracy-contingent benefits is also an important parameter in the model, although democracy-contingent benefits are difficult to measure. In theory, incumbents are aware of their potential share of international benefits before they choose to invite observers, and should be more likely to invite observers when democracy-contingent benefits are greater. Incumbents, however, seek a diverse array of international benefits such as foreign aid, preferential trading arrangements, membership in international organizations, and may seek benefits like international legitimacy or prestige that are not easily quantifiable. The ideal cross-national measure of international benefits would be a precise measure of what each state leader expected to receive as a result of inviting observers and gaining a positive report. Unfortunately, these data are impractical for many reasons, including that they would be very difficult to collect and pseudo-democrats would be unlikely to admit to their true motivations for inviting observers (i.e. that they are attempting to fake democracy in order to gain international benefits). Aggregating the various forms of expected international benefits, ranging from increased foreign direct investment to prestige, would also be problematic.

I instead use a proxy for international interest in supporting democratic states that should be correlated with other democracy-contingent benefits. Bilateral official development assistance is one country-specific observable indicator that can be disaggregated by sector, including foreign aid targeted toward democracy and governance. Data were complied by a team of researchers who, in cooperation with USAID, studied the impact of US democracy assistance on governance. They have made data available for the US and non-US OECD donors from 1990-2005 (Finkel et al. 2006). For each country, I use the percent of total official development

assistance (ODA) devoted to democracy and governance in the previous year, called *Democracy and Governance/ODA*. This measure is based on the assumption that the percent of aid spent on democracy and governance in a country should be an observable pre-election indicator of the degree to which influential international actors support democratization in that country, and is therefore lagged by one year.

Counties that are otherwise strategically important, such as Egypt, or the more recent examples of Iraq and Afghanistan, are likely to gain high levels of foreign assistance for other reasons. Therefore, to account for strategic importance I also include variable indicating the percentage of total US military assistance received by the country in the previous year. Countries receiving a higher percentage of *US Military Assistance* should be less likely to invite observers.

To account for the possibility that a country's decision to invite observers is related to the size of the economy or the country's economic development, I include measures of *GDP (logged)* and *GDP per capita (logged)*. GDP data are from the World Development Indicators (World Bank 2007). Note that the average number of elections held by a given country in the 1991-2006 time period is nine, but ranges from one election to eleven elections (and one to twenty-seven elections in the full 1960-2006 sample). As such, the data are neither standard time-series nor panel data. They are pooled by country, but the variation in the number of temporal observations for each country means that popular statistical tools for binary time series cross-section analyses are not appropriate.[13] Because the decision to invite observers in the current time period is not likely to be independent from the decision to invite observers in

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[13] Statement made based on information in (Beck, Katz, and Tucker 1998). Because the number of time points (*T*) is not "reasonably large" for all units, their recommended method for binary TSCS data is not appropriate.

previous time periods, I include an indicator of whether any previous election in the country was internationally monitored. A year variable is included in all models to account for remaining unexplained temporal variation.

The estimation method is logit regression, and all models include robust standard errors, clustered by country. The specification of the baseline logit model (Model 1) is:

P (observed election| x_i) = $1/(1+e^{-x_i\beta})$, Where $x_i\beta = \beta_0 + \beta_1$ *Previously Observed* + β_2 *Opposition Competition* + β_3 *Consolidated Democracy* + β_4 *Uncertain Type* + β_5 *GDP (logged)* + β_5 *GDP per Capita (logged)* + β_6 *Year*

To summarize, the cross-national results include two sets of variables derived from my theory: those associated with uncertainty over a state's commitment to democracy and those associated with a state's desire for democracy-contingent benefits. Governments should be mostly likely to invite observers when their regime type is not already well established, or when they believe they can gain democracy-contingent benefits.

As shown in Table 1, consistent with expectations, Model 1 shows that a country's previous invitation to observers is a strong predictor of whether a given election will be observed. Also consistent with expectations, elections in which competition is allowed are significantly more likely to be observed than elections in which competition is not allowed. If a country is considered a consolidated democracy, either because it has long been considered fully democratic or it has recently become regarded as such, it is less likely to invite election monitors.

The disaggregated measures of uncertain type are added to Model 2: *Suspended Elections*, *First Multiparty*, and *Transitional Government*. As expected, all three are associated with a positive probability that a given election will be observed, although *Transitional Government* is statistically significant only at the 90% level. I combine the three variables into one measure in Model 3. As in Figure 3, *Uncertain Type* is equal to one if the election is the first

following suspended elections, the first multiparty election, or the election is held by a transitional government. As expected, *Uncertain Type* is associated with significantly greater probability that an election will be observed.

In terms of international benefits, the percent of aid devoted to democracy and governance in the country in the previous year is a significant predictor of invitations to international monitors, as shown in Model 4. Model 4 also includes *US Military Assistance*, which helps account for the fact that democracy promotion is just one of many characteristics valued by powerful states. As expected, countries receiving a greater percentage of US military assistance are less likely to invite observers, although this particular result is sensitive to the inclusion of Egypt and Israel.[14]

[TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE]

Because the size of the effect can not be interpreted directly from the coefficients in logit models, Table 2 provides simulated first differences for the substantively interesting independent variables included in Model 4. When all variables in Model 4 are set at median values, the probability that an election will be observed is 26%. A previous invitation to observers increases the probability that a given election will be observed by about 61%, from 26% to 87%. This finding is consistent with the formation of an international norm, and illustrates that countries are highly likely to continue inviting observers once they have started to do so.

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[14] When Egypt and Israel are excluded from the model, the coefficient on *US Military Assistance* decreases to -0.059 and the standard error nearly doubles, to 0.144. The coefficient and standard error for *Democracy and Governance/ODA* remains nearly identical when Egypt and Israel are excluded.

Also consistent with the model, an uncertain regime type increases the probability that an election will be observed by 44%. Still holding other variables constant at median values, a consolidated democracy decreases the likelihood that an election will be observed by about 19%, and holding competitive elections increased the probability that observers will be invited by 17%. Even though the proxy for international benefits is relatively indirect, it is positive and statistically significant, and associated with an 8% increase in the probability that an election will be observed.

[TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE]

It is also instructive to examine how the predicted probability of an observed election changes with respect to democracy-contingent benefits in a few illustrative cases, rather than when other variables are held at median values. To illustrate, assume a country is holding elections in which competition is allowed, but it is not a consolidated democracy and has never invited observers. This hypothetical government is assumed not to have an uncertain type, and receives no US military aid. In this case, increasing the amount of democracy and governance aid from the 25th percentile (.3%) to the 90th percentile (23%), which is a huge assumed increase in democracy-contingent benefits, increases the probability that an election will be observed by 15%, from 24% to 39%.[15]

For regions with other characteristics that make them unlikely to invite election monitors, increasing democracy-contingent benefits results in a smaller increase in the probability that the election will be observed. For example, consider a country that has never invited observers, does not hold competitive elections, is not a consolidated democracy, does not have a highly uncertain type, receives about 1% of total US military assistance, and receives only a small percentage of

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[15] The 95% confidence interval of the 15% simulated first difference ranges from 2.7% to 28%.

development assistance targeted to democracy and governance. A country with these characteristics is likely to invite observers about 8% of the time. Holding all else equal and changing the percent of development assistance devoted to democracy and governance from the 25th percentile (.3%) to the 90th percentile (23%) increases the probability that an election will be observed from 8% to 15%.[16]

Robustness and Alternative Explanations

I now consider several alternative explanations suggested by the existing literature on election monitoring and the global diffusion of policies in the international system, several of which were already discussed. Presented simplistically, the leading alternative explanations for the widespread diffusion of election monitoring are 1) that international norms like election monitoring are imposed by powerful states; 2) that international norms like election monitoring are generated by the work of activists who pressure states to invite observers; or 3) election monitoring can be explained by other theories of international policy diffusion.

In relation to the first two alternatives, I argue that election observation was initiated by governments rather than demanded by powerful states or advocated by norm entrepreneurs. As referenced above, there is little evidence that activists pressured governments to invite observers, and the evidence she provides of norm entrepreneurship is entirely in the 1990s, well after election observation was initiated and spread. Thus, my argument is distinct from those who argue that norm entrepreneurs must have existed because election observation has become an international norm (Kelley 2008a).

Also referenced above, there is little evidence that powerful states pressured governments to invite observers before election monitoring became an international norm. Other scholars have

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[16] The 95% confidence interval of the 7% simulated first difference ranges from 1% to 15%

documented this more exhaustively, but it is not clear whether such pressure would have succeeded in spreading election observation. Among leading democracy promoters, concerns about whether election monitoring violated sovereignty were raised on numerous occasions, especially within the Organization for American States, and, as Santa-Cruz argues, international election monitoring was "not just a practice imposed by the United States on its weak neighbors" (Santa-Cruz 2005a, 679).

There are two other alternative explanations offered by the existing literature. Kelley provides one of the few other cross-national studies of election observation, and finds that countries in the "middle" of the *POLITY* scale are most likely to invite observers (Kelley 2008b). This is similar to my argument about whether there is uncertainty about a government's commitment to democracy, but is more general, and does not detail a precise causal mechanism about why mid-levels of regime type should predict election observation. To evaluate this claim relative to my argument, I add Kelley's measure of a government's regime type to my model: the *POLITY2* measure from the *POLITY* IV data, and the same measure squared (Marshall and Jaggers 2002). The twenty-one point *POLITY2* scale ranges from -10 to 10, or most autocratic to most democratic. Because using the *POLITY* data introduce new sources of missing data, the number of observations drops from 707 to 651, I first replicate Model 4 without the observations for which *POLITY* scores are not available. As shown in Model 5, dropping these observations does not significantly change the results presented from Model 4. Model 6 adds *POLITY* and *POLITY Squared* to Model 5. When included in a model with measures of uncertainty over a government's commitment to democracy and levels of international democracy-contingent benefits, the variables are jointly insignificant, indicating a lack of support for Kelley's emphasis

on the level of democracy as an explanation for why governments invite observers.[17]

A final alternative explanation for election monitoring is suggested by the literature on international diffusion of policies. Although the policy diffusion literature is not intended to explain international norm formation, my theory can be connected to it in several ways. Recent work explaining policy diffusion also focuses on the instrumental motivations of states. For example, Beth Simmons and Zachary Elkins argue that the diffusion of neoliberal economic policies, including capital account liberalization, exchange rate policy unification, and current account liberalization, have taken place in part due to international factors that influence information and the set of policy choices. They argue that the incentives for a given state to adopt a policy are influenced by the foreign policy choices of other states, and the information used by governments to make policy choices is also altered by policy choices in other states (Simmons and Elkins 2004a). Similarly, Simmons, Frank Dobbin, and Geoffrey Garrett theorize that policies diffuse between states via four processes: coercion, competition, learning, and emulation (Simmons, Dobbin, and Garrett 2008, 2006). Competition, learning and emulation are all arguably elements of my signaling model of norm formation, although my theory can be considered a more specific version of a diffusion model, and outlines a more precise causal mechanism. Kristian Gleditsch and Michael Ward highlight international factors in explaining the global diffusion of democratic political institutions (Gleditsch and Ward 2006). In addition to domestic causes of democratization, they demonstrate that a democratic transition is more likely in a given non-democracy if neighboring countries also democratize, and "firmly reject the idea that institutional change is driven entirely by domestic processes and unaffected by regional

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[17] The null hypothesis that the coefficients for *POLITY* and *POLITYSquared* are both equal to zero cannot be rejected, with χ^2 (2) = 0.97 and prob. $> \chi^2$ =0.62.

and international events" (Gleditsch and Ward 2006, 930). Like Simmons, Dobbin, and Garrett, however, they do not define the casual mechanism underlying the relationship between regional and international variables and democratic transitions.

Across the literature on international policy diffusion, international norms are treated as a potential explanatory variable rather than a topic to be explained, and several scholars set up norm-based explanations for diffusion as an alternative to strategic explanations for diffusion. For example, Gleditsch and Ward present the argument that "norms and values…favor the development and durability of democratic rule" as an alternative to their explanation. Simmons and Elkins argue that one way that the policy choice payoffs can be altered are "ideational" and "work through the more subjective pressures of prevailing global norms" (Simmons and Elkins 2004b, 172). This contrast presents an incomplete picture of the role of international norms in explaining the widespread diffusion of a variety of policies and practice among states. Although these scholars do not attempt to explain international norms, many of the substantive topics they explore would be perhaps better understood with attention to international norm formation and the changing beliefs of among international actors.

Thus, the literature on policy diffusion suggests a second alternative explanation for the spread of election monitoring. My theory explicitly involves mimicry of election monitoring by other states, and I account for this empirically by specifying the characteristics of individual regimes that are most likely to benefit from mimicking the signal, and therefore invite observers. Related arguments in the diffusion literature would suggest that a country would be more likely to invite international observers if that country's neighboring states also invited observers. Therefore, to evaluate the explanatory power of a more general diffusion argument, I include a variable that measures the percentage of all elections that were internationally monitored in a

given region in the previous year. For each country, *Regional Percent Observed* excludes elections that took place in that country in the previous year, so it is not necessarily equal across all region-years.[18] Model 7 adds *Regional Percent Observed* to Model 4. *Regional Percent Observed* is not statistically significant, although the sign is in the predicted direction.

The comparison to alternative explanations suggest that the election and regime-specific variables derived from my theory are better predictors of internationally monitored elections than the more general measures of regime type and regional diffusion suggested by the existing literature. These findings support the empirical implications outlined above and lend general support to my theory relative to the central alternative explanations that can be evaluated in this framework. Note that the alternative explanations evaluated in Models 6-7 are sufficiently general that they are also consistent with my argument. Nevertheless, the cross-national empirical evidence provides strong support for the empirical implications derived from my model, and shows that variables associated with my signaling theory of norm development are more strongly correlated with observed elections than leading alternative explanations.

Conclusions

This article began with an empirical puzzle. Many leaders invite international election observers, cheat in front of them, and face negative consequences as a result. For pseudo-democrats, being caught cheating by international observers can lead to international condemnation, domestic uprising, and an overall reduction in the probability that they will

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[18] Note that in related work on this subject, I had also included *POLITY* and Regional Percent Observed as central independent variables explaining internationally monitored elections.

maintain their hold on power.[19] The existence of the norm of election observation explains this puzzle. Without the norm, held and enforced by the international community, the rate of observed elections should have begun decreasing by the end of the 1990s as observers grew better at catching election fraud and more likely to sanction fraudulent elections. Instead, the rate of observed elections continued to increase during this time period, even as the risks associated with inviting grew. In other issue areas within international relations, the creation of such costly norms has been explained as the result of pressure from activists or powerful states. Election observation, in contrast, was initiated by state leaders to signal their government's commitment to democratization. As more international benefits were linked to democracy, leaders who were not necessarily committed democrats also had the incentive to invite observers. This repeated behavior resulted in acceptance of election observation as compatible with respect for state sovereignty, and in the widely shared belief that all true-democrats invite observers and receive their endorsement.

This theory of norm formation was developed to explain election monitoring, but could also be applied to other international norms triggered by changing values or preferences among influential international actors. Any change in the characteristics valued by international actors can provoke a similar strategic response by states seeking to maximize their share of international benefits. For example, this theory could potentially be applied to the question of why states seeking foreign investment are now expected to invite evaluation from credit rating

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[19] See Fearon 2006 for a discussion of how international election observation can increase the probability of post-election coordination to protest fraudulent elections and "enforce" democracy. See also Gandhi and Przeworski (2009) for a discussion of how monitoring changes the incentives for governments to engage in election fraud.

agencies. A number of states invite (and pay for) sovereign credit ratings even when they are likely to receive a poor rating (Cooley 2003; Sinclair 1994). Other potential applications include the diffusion of institutions like independent central banks, even when states do not necessarily need the policy credibility that central banks arguably bring (McNamara 2002; Maxfield 1998). Similarly, my theory could be applied to explaining monitoring or compliance norms within international regimes, such as the expectation that states that refuse monitoring by the International Atomic Energy Agency must be hiding weapons of mass destruction. In addition to the norm of election observation, international pressure for democracy arguably generated other international norms, and my signaling theory of norm development—in which the norm is the internationally shared belief that all "good" types of states adopt a specific behavior—may help explain why even the most autocratic leaders choose to hold elections; or why certain technical features of elections, such as independent election commissions, are becoming increasingly accepted as standard practice.

A further implication of this theory is that international benefits tied to democracy and the resulting incentive to "fake" democratization may in part explain why many countries continue in the institutionally ambiguous space between democracy and autocracy. Similar dynamics may be at work in other issue areas like human rights, labor standards, and environmental policy. Further research should explore these issues, as well as the domestic effects of election observation, the credibility of international and domestic monitors, and other consequences of international pressure for democracy.

Figure 1: Rate of Internationally Observed Elections, 1960-2006
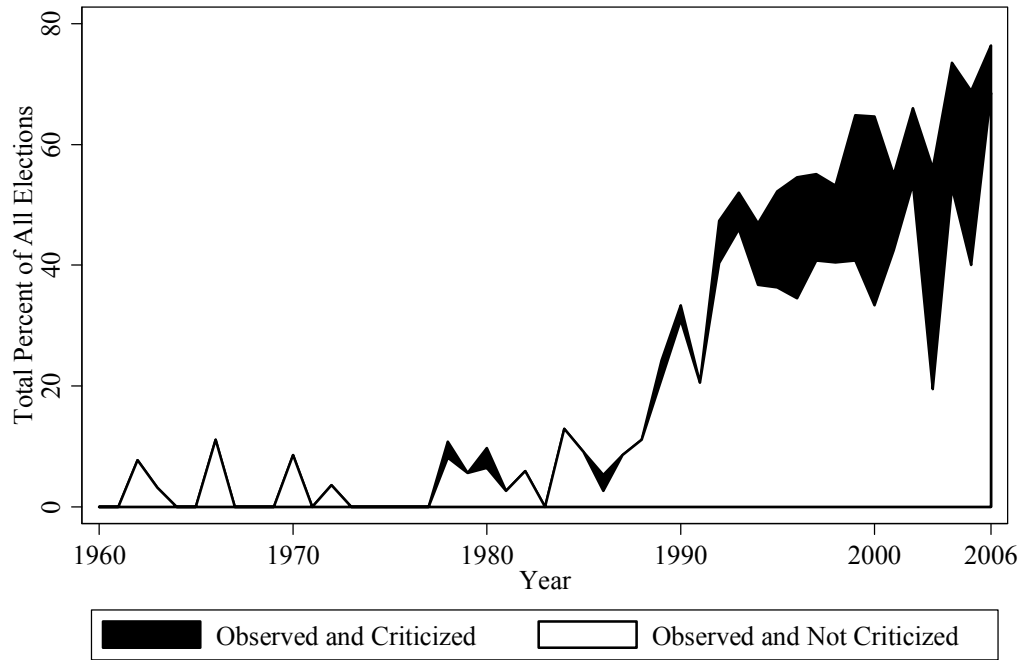
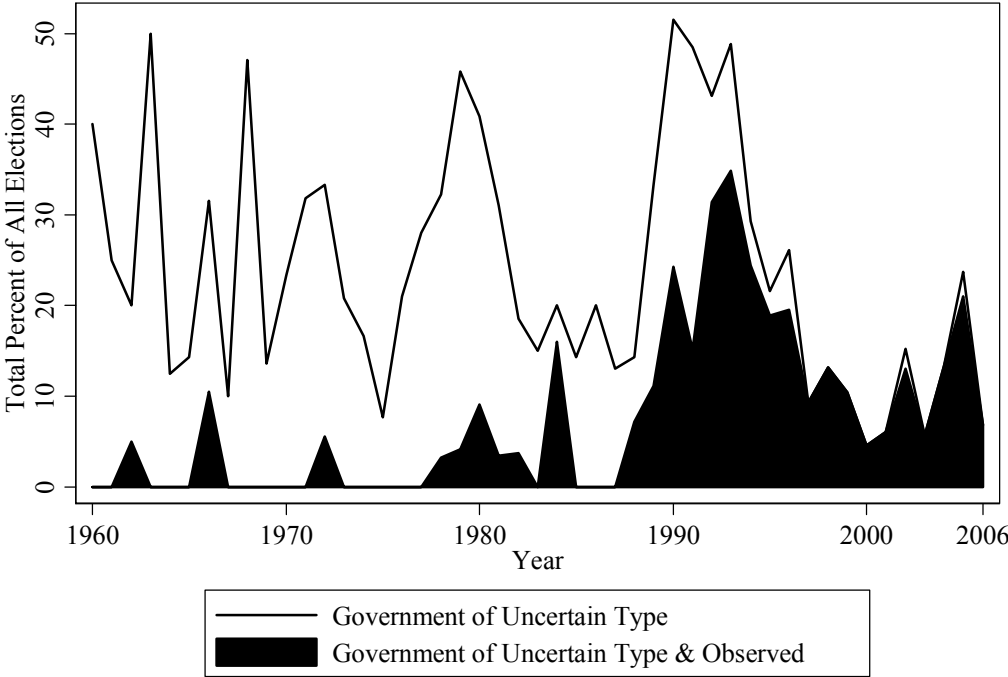Note: Excludes States with Population < 500,000. Source: Author.

Figure 2: Polity Scores in Observed Elections vs. Global Average

Average Polity Score in Year Prior to Observed Elections

Average Global Polity Score
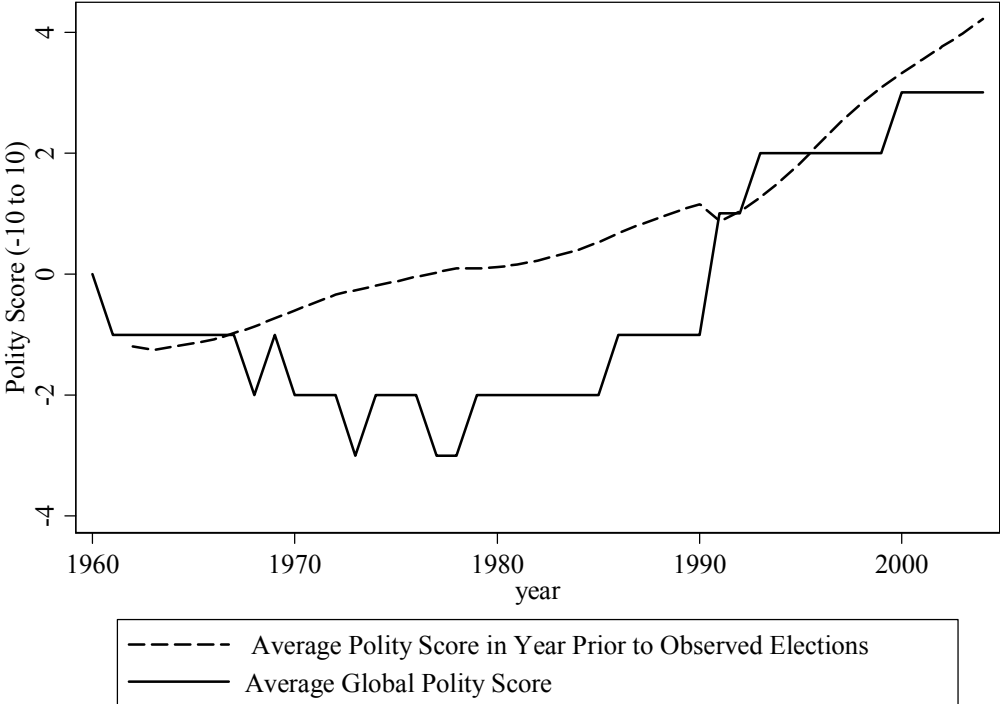
Figure 3: Elections, Uncertain Regime Type, and Election Observation, 1960-2006

Table 1:Binary Logit, Observed Elections

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7
Previously Observed	2.840**	3.115**	3.116**	3.013**	3.067**	3.003**	3.040**
	(0.332)	(0.312)	(0.308)	(0.311)	(0.323)	(0.322)	(0.326)
Opposition Competition	1.389**	1.296**	1.271**	1.307**	1.313**	1.075*	1.197**
	(0.409)	(0.426)	(0.383)	(0.403)	(0.428)	(0.500)	(0.434)
Consolidated Democracy	-1.642*	-1.888**	-1.850*	-1.670*	-1.578*	-1.532	-1.666*
	(0.664)	(0.700)	(0.721)	(0.779)	(0.777)	(0.819)	(0.785)
Previous Elections Suspended		1.353**					
		(0.399)					
First Multiparty		0.997*					
		(0.446)					
Transitional Government		1.049					
		(0.593)					
Uncertain Type				1.754**	1.937**	2.029**	2.050**	2.111**
				(0.329)	(0.343)	(0.363)	(0.363)	(0.359)
Democracy and Governance / ODA (computed from 2-year mean)					3.058*	3.785**	3.671**	3.917**
					(1.289)	(1.330)	(1.318)	(1.305)
US Military Assistance (Current USD) $_{t-1}$					-0.195*	-0.103	-0.103	-0.089
					(0.084)	(0.072)	(0.075)	(0.076)
GDP (logged)	-0.092	-0.075	-0.066	0.006	0.008	-0.010	0.036
	(0.090)	(0.096)	(0.098)	(0.100)	(0.105)	(0.104)	(0.106)
GDP per capita (logged)	-0.441**	-0.260	-0.296*	-0.378**	-0.373*	-0.368*	-0.378*
	(0.124)	(0.145)	(0.138)	(0.137)	(0.145)	(0.172)	(0.149)
Year	0.041	0.079*	0.087*	0.067	0.057	0.063	0.043
	(0.034)	(0.035)	(0.036)	(0.035)	(0.039)	(0.040)	(0.038)
POLITY						0.027	
						(0.031)	
POLITY Squared						-0.004	
						(0.006)	
Regional Percent Observed $_{t-1}$							0.948
							(0.583)
Constant	-78.283	-156.926*	-173.337*	-132.889	-114.559	-124.588	-87.144
	(66.778)	(70.517)	(71.357)	(70.129)	(78.005)	(79.273)	(75.913)
Wald X^2	176.71	224.97	236.83	222.83	204.49	203.48	201.90
Prob $> X^2$	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Pseudo-R^2	0.4821	0.5138	0.5132	0.5299	0.525	0.526	0.535
Observations	714	714	714	707	651	651	666

Robust standard errors in parentheses and are clustered by country.
*significant at 5%; ** significant at 1%

Table 2: Effects of Country Characteristics on the Probability of Inviting Observers

When this Variable…	Shifts from …to …	Change in Prob. Of Observed Election (95% confidence interval)
Previously Observed	Zero to One	61% (52% 70%)
Competitive	Zero to One	17% (8% 26%)
Democratic	Zero to One	-19% (-29% -3%)
Uncertain Type	Zero to One	44% (31% 56%)
Democracy and Governance / ODA	25th to 75th percentile	8% (1.5% 14%)
US Military Assistance	25th to 75th percentile	-0.2% (-0.4% -0.02%)

Notes: Estimations are based on a logit model estimated in Stata 10.0, with first differences drawn from 1000 simulations performed by CLARIFY(Tomz, Wittenberg, and King 2003).

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